

CHAPTER III: THE SYMBOLS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

III.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Twenty- nine of the Iron Age Common stelae are engraved with symbols and all the Persian period tombstones represent shrines strongly influenced by Egyptian *naiskoi*. Some stelae bear more than one symbol: a combination of two (12, 14, 28, 44), three (12, 26, 27), and more (stele 53-59) is attested.

The execution of all symbols is characterized by poor workmanship and lack of professional and artistic skills. The various representations are all very crude and the represented items are often simplified beyond recognition. With a few exceptions, they are simple incisions produced by cutting tools with a pointed edge.

There is no general rule as to where the symbol was placed on a stele. On the inscribed tombstones the symbol may be placed above (stele 5, 7, 12, 14, 15, 25) or below (17, 20, 32, 35, 38, 42) the name of the deceased. In one instance (stele 24), part of the inscription is above while the rest is below the motif. In another (stele 32), the inscription is placed between two symbols, one above and one below it. On the uninscribed stelae, the symbol is differently situated: it may occupy the whole front side of the stone (stele 10, 11, 28, 44, 45) or it may be restricted to its upper part (stele 6, 27). In most cases however, the stelae were sawn making it difficult to determine the location of the motif.

Different symbols were identified on the stelae: some represent astral bodies, like the sun-disc and the crescent moon, some plants like the palmette, the pomegranate and the lotus, some human figures, some geometric motifs like triangles, and crosses, some Egyptian hieroglyphs, and finally some architectural motifs like the shrine.

With a few exceptions the identification of the symbols remains questionable. Except for clear Egyptian motifs, scholars remain divided on the identification and meaning of almost all symbols. Even in case of a correct identification of the represented item, the meaning often escapes us. This is a major problem that is mainly due to the total lack of Phoenician religious texts and to the limited number of Phoenician funerary monuments.

Next to local oriental symbols, the iconography of the Phoenician stelae borrowed mainly, if not exclusively, from Egyptian religious motifs: winged sun-disc, *uraei*, hieroglyphic signs as well as architectural elements are attested. Hölbl (1989: 324-325) looked into the way Phoenicians used Egyptian motifs and concluded that they understood very well the meaning and use of the items they borrowed. They were also clearly aware of their religious content and used them as such. In some instances, they used them for mere decoration and in a way different from that in which Egyptians used them. They combined them with local Canaanite symbols, in accordance with their own beliefs and needs: « *Der Phöniker kopiert die ägyptischen Ikonographien so gut er kann und solange er sie inhaltlich mit seinen Vorstellungen in Einklang bringen vermag. Er scheut sich jedoch nicht, die ägyptischen Motive untereinander und mit asiatischen selbständig zu kombinieren* » (Hölbl 1989: 325).

The study of Phoenician funerary symbols has been conditioned and often hindered by the haphazard of archaeological discovery: while the Punic world, mainly Carthage, Sicily, and Sardinia was yielding thousands of stelae carved with various motifs (for a recent summary of this material and the related bibliography see Tore 1995:

Chapters 17c and 17d), the Phoenician motherland had hardly anything to offer to study the origin, transmission, and development of their iconography, leaving the history of the symbols and their interpretation relatively in the dark.

To compensate for the limited evidence from Phoenicia, one has sometimes to question its Mediterranean settlements. The Punic stelae found in the funerary contexts of cemeteries and *tophets* have yielded a wealth of symbols, which have been discussed in various publications. Brown gave in her up-dated Ph.D. dissertation (1991) the latest results of scholarly research dealing with the subject as well as an exhaustive bibliographical list related to the various theories concerning the origin and interpretation of Punic symbols. Lipinski (1995: 206-215) summed up the latest evidence on the origin of the sign of Tanit.

In recent years, the publication of various studies dealing mainly with Phoenician and Palestinian glyptic and other small finds (Markoe 1985; Bordreuil 1986; Gubel 1987; Keel and Uehlinger 1992, 1994; Sass-Uehlinger 1993; Nunn 2000; Uehlinger 2000; Gubel 2002), as well as publications investigating Egyptian borrowings in Phoenician art (Wagner 1980; Hölbl 1986 and 1989) have substantially improved our knowledge and understanding of some recurring Phoenician symbols.

In this chapter symbols appearing on the stelae will be identified and interpreted, when possible, in the light of local Canaanite traditions, which may prove more useful for understanding their origin and meaning. When possible, the contribution of Phoenician iconography to the development of later Punic symbols will be underlined.

III.2 THE SYMBOLS: IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION

III.2.a The disc, the winged disc, the disc flanked by *uraei* (Fig. 102)

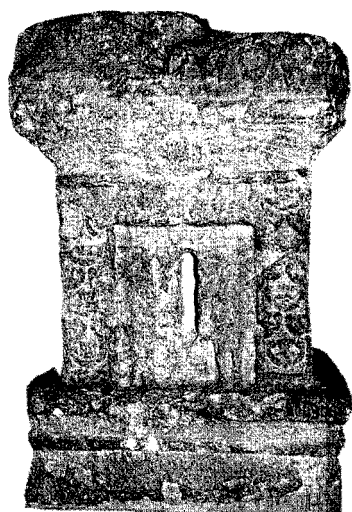
A symbol representing a simple circle or disc appears on the Common stelae. It is represented either alone (stela 5, 10, 25, 32?), associated with the crescent moon (12, 14, 27) or with other symbols like the cross and *ankh* signs (stela 26). This disc is one of the most widespread symbols in Near Eastern iconography and it is widely believed to represent the sun. In the Persian period, the simple disc that appears on the standard stelae changes drastically and adopts clear Egyptian features: it is represented winged or flanked by *uraei*.

In Egyptian religion the sun played a very important role as symbol of regeneration and rebirth and the deceased identified him/herself with the sun in order to be regenerated with him in the netherworld (Watson 1991: 166 ff). The meaning of the sun-disc on funerary stelae could have been borrowed from Egyptian religion to symbolize regeneration. The sun disc is sometimes flanked by *uraei*. The *uraeus* accompanied the sun god in the underworld and had a clear protective function because it was believed to spit fire at the enemies (Watson 1991: 167).

Wagner (1980: 166ff) and more recently Parayre (1990: 269 ff), dealt with the meaning of the borrowed Egyptian sun-disc. Wagner raised the issue of its use by the Phoenicians: did it have a symbolic religious value identical to the one it had in Egypt or was it simply used as a decorative element? After a review of the literature on the subject, which however mainly deals with the classical period, he concluded that both the winged sun-disc and the one flanked by *uraei* represent the Sun-god: «Auch die folgenden Beispiele machen deutlich, dass es sich bei der geflügelten bzw. Flügellosen Sonnenscheibe um ein Symbol des Sonnengottes handelt...» (Wagner 1980: 166). However, Wagner also noted that in some instances the disc with *uraei* might represent other gods (see also Wilkinson 1992: 109), and the winged sun-disc might have a general cosmic, more specifically protective value.

Parayre (1990: 293), who studied the winged sun-disc symbol in West Semitic glyptic, concluded that it underwent several changes and had different, successive values: from a royal image it developed an apotropaic function and ended up as a mere decorative element.

Finally, Keel and Uehlinger (1992: 294) noted that the winged sun-disc is a very common symbol in Phoenician glyptic and they underlined the cosmic and protective meaning of the wings: «Die Flügel dürften ebenso sehr eine uranische wie eine schützende Konnotation haben. In Kombination mit dem Sonnengott bezeugen sie eine geheimnisvolle Verbindung von unnahbarer Ferne und wirksamem Schutz» (1992: 282). They also strongly objected to the opinion that these symbols had a mere decorative purpose and carried no religious connotation. They fully agree with Hölbl (1989) that the Phoenicians were familiar with Egyptian culture and understood its religious content perfectly well.



Stele 58



Stele 59



Stele 54



Stele 55

Fig. 102 *Naiskoi* with winged sun-disc and sun-disc flanked by *uraei*

III.2.b The Crescent-disc (Fig. 103)

The crescent appears on the stelae only in connection with the disc (except maybe on stele 32) and this is the reason why both symbols are discussed together. Crescent moon symbols are widely attested alone in Levantine iconography in general. Keel (1994: 135 ff and Figs. 1-102) and Theuer (2000) collected the evidence related to the Moon-god symbol in both Mesopotamia and Canaan and showed that the god appears overwhelmingly as a crescent, rarely as a lunar disc, and sometimes as a crescent and full moon together. The crescent moon alone appears also in Phoenician glyptic (Bordreuil 1986: No 4) but is not so far clearly attested on Phoenician funerary stelae.

The association of the disc with the crescent moon in both Phoenicia and the Punic world is so common, that scholars coined a new name for the symbol these two motifs form together: the «disc-crescent» or «crescent-disc» symbol. Disc and crescent always appear in an almost invariable association, which is that found on the stelae under discussion: the crescent is inverted and encompasses the disc. While the stelae seem to have made use exclusively of this characteristic representation of the crescent-disc motif, Phoenician and Palestinian glyptic (Bordreuil 1986: No 8, 28; Keel and Uehlinger 1992: Figs 292, 319) and Israelite shrine models (Bretschneider 1991: Pl. 94) attest another asso-

ciation of these astral symbols whereby the crescent is placed below the disc. This seems to follow an old oriental tradition in the representation of these heavenly bodies, which is attested as early as the Late Bronze Age in Syria and Palestine. Evidence for this same symbol is provided by Mitanni seals (Mayer-Opificius 1984: 221: 18, 219: 22, 215: 28) and by the famous stele of Hazor representing the moon crescent below the disc above two raised hands (Bisi 1967: Fig. 1; see also Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 58). This evidence confirms the oriental roots of the crescent-disc symbol.

The representation of the inverted crescent encompassing the disc seems to be predominant only in the Phoenician-Punic world as attested not only by the evidence of the stelae but also by that of 6th c. B.C. Cypro-Phoenician shrine models (Bretschneider 1991: Pls. 99-102), by a Cypriot column capital (Perrot-Chipiez 1885: 116, Fig. 53), by a Cypriot gold strip from Amathus (Barnett 1975: Fig. 43), by the relief depicted on the lid of a stone sarcophagus found in a tomb at Cheikh Zenad in North Lebanon (Brossé 1926: 195 and Pl. 39: 2), which may date to the Persian period, and finally by the Sarafand statue (Ronzevalle 1932: Pl. X: 13).

The identification of these symbols in Phoenician and Punic iconography was first discussed in the context of the recurring disc-crescent symbol on Punic stelae. Both the identification and the interpretation of the symbols were influenced by the fact that the Punic stelae on which the symbols occur were discovered in their overwhelming majority in *tophets* and most of them bore a dedication to Tanit and Baal Hamon.

With the exception of Gsell (1920: 262) who interpreted these two symbols as two phases of the moon, all other scholars agree to see in them the moon crescent and the solar disc (Dussaud 1903: 125; Hours-Miédan 1950: 37; Picard 1954: 78). Gsell saw the origin of the motif in what he called *lumière cendrée*, that is the symbol representing the crescent within a full moon as depicted on Assyrian stelae representing the Moon-god (Black and Green 1992: Fig. 47), and Aramaean stelae and seals (Seidl 2000: Fig. 5b; Bordreuil 1986: Nos 123, 124). Keel and Uehlinger (1992: 340 ff) also interpreted the disc that appears in association with the crescent moon in Canaanite and Israelite glyptic as the full moon or lunar disc. While the disc alone is almost unanimously identified as the sun, the disc associated with the crescent moon may be differently interpreted as the sun or the moon, a difference, which has a clear bearing on the understanding of the symbol.

The meaning of the crescent-disc symbol was first discussed only in connection with the Punic stelae. No consensus was reached: some scholars, like Dussaud (1903: 125) and Yadin (1970: 216 ff but compare Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 58 for the evidence from Hazor), think that the moon represents Tanit and the solar disc Baal Hamon. This interpretation is obviously linked to the fact that the stelae on which the symbol appears bear a dedication to these two gods. Others like Picard (1976: 82) believe that these elements symbolize immortality. In her recent survey of the related literature, Brown (1986: 136-137) did not take a stand on the issue and pointed out that this combined symbol «... is the least likely to be interpreted securely since its presumably astral symbolism was simply too widespread among too many different ancient peoples to whom it signified a wide variety of concepts».

In their Phoenician context, these symbols are more difficult to interpret for absence of relevant texts. While in Mesopotamia and Syria the crescent has been generally identified as the Moon-god Sin and the disc as the Sun-god Shamash, little has been said about their association with divine beings in the Phoenician world. The Sun-god Shamash in Phoenicia is attested only in personal names while some inscriptions refer to his cult in Carthage (Lipinski 1995: 264 ff). The same meager evidence is related to the moon-god. No Phoenician name for the moon-god is attested (Theuer 2000: 309-310). Shaggar, the old Syrian Moon-god, *ks'*, «Full moon», and the Semitic moon-god *yrh* are attested only in Phoenician and Punic personal names (Lipinski 1995: 352; Theuer 2000: 312). Theuer (2000: 316) refutes the identification of Baal Hamon with the Moon-god. Since the attributes of Sun- and Moon-god are unknown in Phoenicia, it is difficult to decide whether the astral symbols represented on funerary stelae refer to the divine beings themselves or to other unidentified cosmic forces. Xella (1991: 109) opts for the latter alternative.

One option for the interpretation of the crescent-disc in Phoenicia is to give it the same meaning as the one it is generally assumed to have had in Carthage, i.e. symbol of Tanit and Baal Hamon, the assumption being that these two gods played the same prominent role in the funerary cult of Phoenicia as well. This interpretation, which is still highly contested in the Punic world, needs direct and more serious evidence from the motherland to gain some credibility (Theuer 2000: 314 ff).

Another suggestion is to see in this combined symbol the great goddess Astarte (Brossé 1926: 196; Ronzevalle 1932: 57 with references). This identification was recently strengthened by the iconography of an Israelite seal from Lachish (Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 369 ff and Fig. 319) on which the crescent-disc symbol appears together with a dove, the animal symbol of Astarte. This association may suggest the connection of the symbol with this major goddess and it may represent her.

Years of debate and of contradicting opinions have not helped solve the problem of the interpretation of the crescent-disc symbol. One is seriously led to wonder whether Ronzevalle's judicious reflection on the subject some



Stele 14



Stele 5



Stele 27



Stele 12

Fig. 103. Sun-disc and crescent-disc symbols.

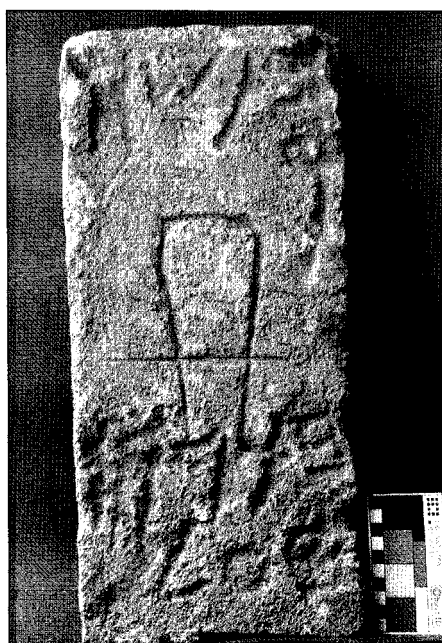
seventy years ago was not closer to the truth than any of the above-mentioned theories. The French scholar (1932: 58) totally rejected any connection with a specific deity and strongly believed that the inverted crescent moon over a disc, so typical of Phoenician and Punic stelae, represents simply heavens: «*En réalité, ce symbole... signifie ciel en général, non seulement par la réunion de deux grands astres, le Soleil et la Lune, mais encore par la position même du croissant, qui y joue à la fois le rôle de l'astre de la nuit et celui de la voûte céleste.*»

III.2.c The hemispherical, the U-shaped, and pillar-shaped betyls

The hemispherical symbol (Fig. 104)

Two stelae, 15 and 24, bear an incised hemispherical form, which is cut by a horizontal line. The nature of this symbol is *a priori* difficult to determine. Similar representations of massive objects have been usually identified as *betyls* (Bisi 1967: 60-61; see also stele 15). The symbol under discussion is very similar to the stelae with rounded upper edges, which are depicted on Tyrian coins (Will 1952-53: Fig. 1). They were differently interpreted as «pierres ambrosiennes», ambrosial rocks, (Milik 1967: 572 and note 1; see also Bonnet-Lipinski 1992a: 26) or as pillars of the Melqart temple (Will 1952-53: 8; Gubel 1992: 431). Mettinger (1995: 98) suggests that they are the «aniconic iconography» of the god Melqart. The hieroglyphic sign «hobble for cattle» (Gardiner 1957) used as determinative for palanquin or portable shrine, may also be drawn here for comparison. This hieroglyphic sign is also identical to one of the Tanit symbols, which appear on Punic stelae (Bisi 1967: Fig. 7n). The closest parallels to this symbol come from Carthage where such hemispherical *betyls* are attested standing on Egyptian bases (Fig. 105) (Brown 1986: Fig. 45, *dd*). Other parallels are attested in Petra where the hemispherical stone is standing on an altar or podium called *mwth* (Mettinger 1995: 63-64, Fig. 3.6.)

The identification of the symbol with a *betyl* on the above-mentioned stelae is highly plausible but it is made difficult by the fact that the hemispherical object, which supposedly represents the sacred stone, continues below the horizontal line that cuts it. This feature (horizontal surface resting on two legs) has been explained as an altar (or a base) on which the *betyl* was placed (Bisi 1967: 61). The fact that the «altar's» feet or sides are drawn as prolongation of the «*betyl's*» sides may be ascribed to the stonecutter's lack of artistic skills.



Stele 24



Stele 15

Fig. 104. Hemispherical symbols.

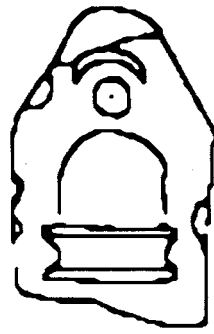


Fig. 105. A parallel to hemispherical *betyls* on podium from Carthage (Brown 1986: Fig. 45 *dd*).

In the East, *betyls* are attested mainly on thrones, podiums, or inside portable shrines. In the West too there is evidence for round or hemispherical *betyls* placed on thrones (see for ex. Bisi 1967: Pl. X, 2). The symbol on stelae 15 and 24 could represent a *betyl* placed on a simplified representation of a podium, altar, throne or palanquin. *Betyls* placed in so-called Astarte thrones are depicted on Sidonian coins of the Persian and later Classical period as well as on stone models of such thrones (Seyrig 1966: 22ff; For a review of the evidence related to thrones and *betyls* in Phoenicia, see Mettinger 1995: 100-108; see also the evidence from stelae 58 and 59). There is also ample evidence that these *betyls* were carried inside portable shrines during religious ceremonies. In his description of the Sidonian coins, Ronzevalle observed that (1932: 52 and Pl. VIII-X): «*Les poutres ... qui se projettent en avant de la caisse du char, indiquent que le baldaquin avec son contenu était mobile et pouvait être transporté à bras d'homme*», and Soyez¹ (1972: 156) agreed with this interpretation: «*... des bronzes... montrent le même «bétyle», transporté cette fois dans un édicule processionnel...*». Milik (1967: 570) explained that *betyls* were essentially transportable stones because of their origin as meteors. He refers to this characteristic as «*automotion miraculeuse*» and «*mobilité liturgique*».

To sum up: the symbol under discussion may represent the sacred *betyl* on a piece of furniture or architectural element.

The U-shaped symbol (Fig. 106)

The widespread cult of the *betyl* was probably represented in yet another symbol that occurs on stele 28, 29, and 35. It consists of a U-shaped, very deep incision in the stone, which resulted in the creation of an ovoid protuberance inside it. It appears twice alone (stele 29, 35) and once with the cross motif (stele 28). Only one parallel is known from a Carthaginian stele where it is represented between a hammer and a nail. Brown (1986: 268) describes it as a tool. In spite of their identical general shape, the U-shaped symbol of the funerary stelae from Lebanon seems to represent a different item because the emphasis is on the resulting protuberance within the U-shaped incision and not on the latter.

The clue to its identification as a *betyl* was suggested by Seyrig's observation of one of the Sidonian Astarte thrones he was able to study: «*Sur un des trônes votifs de Sidon, le siège est façonné de manière à former une cavité en U, ouverte vers le haut, exactement comme pour contenir un globe...*» (Seyrig 1966: 24). On some others, he observed that there were holes, which were meant to fix such an object. This is also the case of stele 58 and 59 which had a *betyl* inserted on the back of the seat. Seyrig identified the object placed in the U-shaped cavity as a *betyl*, which, as previously explained, was removed and carried during religious ceremonies: «*En certaines occasions, on extrayait le bétyle pour le conduire en procession sur une litière*» (1966: 25; see also description of throne No 4 on the same page). The U-shaped motif on the stelae most probably symbolizes such a «movable» *betyl*.

1. Soyez believes that the object depicted on the Sidonian coins is a stone vase and not a *betyl*. Her suggestion is based on the archaeological evidence from Bustan esh-Sheikh where such plain stone vessels were found. This evidence however does not rule out the fact that *betyls* are also depicted as round, hemispherical, and rectangular stones and attested on Astarte thrones.



Stele 28



Stele 29



Stele 35



Stele 54

Fig. 106. U-Shaped and pillar-shaped symbols.

The pillar-shaped symbol (Fig. 106)

Betyls are also clearly represented on stele 54 where they form a group of two sacred rectangular stones placed inside an Egyptian type of shrine, a so-called *naiskos*. They stand on an Egyptian type of podium. They have many exact parallels on Punic stelae where according to Bisi (1967: 60-61): « *Le immagini più diffuse sulle stele a edicola egittizzante sono I betili..., i quali appaiono in guisa di pilastri...rettangolari, semplici o doppi o tripli...* ».

It is certainly not surprising to find an overwhelming number of symbols representing one of the oldest and of the most popular aspects of local Phoenician religion. *Betyls* were indeed widespread in ancient Near Eastern, mainly Canaanite religion and their cult is attested since the 3rd millennium B.C. in Syria (Durand 1988: 5-6). As already mentioned in Chapter II, the *Betyl* is attested in Akkadian texts where it is called *sikkanum*. According to Durand (1985: 83): «...le *sikkanum* représente de façon explicite une pierre de haute taille qui, non seulement, est susceptible de recevoir un culte, mais aussi se réfère à une divinité précise ». Lipinski (1992b: 70) defines it as «...une pierre dressée, une stèle, une idole, un bloc ou table de pierre, de formes et dimensions diverses...qui localise la présence divine et marque l'emplacement d'un lieu saint ». He also underlines the fact that these stones were never worshipped for their own sake but only as manifestation of divine presence.

The Semitic cult dedicated to the worship of non-iconic stones was already widespread in Bronze Age Syria and is widely attested in the Mari texts (Durand 1985: 79 ff). The cult of the *betyl* also flourished in Iron Age as well as in later Greek and Roman Syria/Palestine (Seyrig 1974: 87 ff; Lipinski 1992b: 70-71 with relevant bibliography; Lipinski 2000: 599 ff).

Betyls are also archaeologically attested. The oldest archaeological evidence for a *betyl* is the conical stone discovered by Parrot in the courtyard of the Early Dynastic Ninni-Zaza temple in Mari (Parrot 1967: 25 and Figs 18, 19 and Pl. III). Second millennium evidence for the worship of standing stones comes from the so-called Obelisk temple in Byblos (Dunand 1963: 51-52). Wagner (1980: 116) underlined the local religious nature of these standing stones, which borrowed their external shape from Egyptian obelisks but which were worshipped as *betyls* or cultic stones. Another evidence for the *betyl* cult comes from Middle Bronze Age Gezer, Tell Kittan, and Megiddo where standing stones have been also found (Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 37-39 with related bibliography and Figs. 22 and 26a). Finally the Late Bronze Age temple in Hazor (Yadin 1958: Pls. XXIX: 1-3; XXX: 1) yielded similar stones.

During the Iron Age *betyls* are mentioned as *maššeboth* in the Bible and a god *Baatili* is listed among the gods protecting the treaty of Asarhaddon and Ba'alu of Tyre (Borger 1956: 109; see also Chapter II under Sakon). In the Greco-Roman period, this god continued to be worshipped as *Baitylos* (Seyrig 1974) and the *betyl* cult witnessed a wide popularity as attested by the famous black stone cult of Emesa and the representation of the *betyl* in a temple of Byblos on coins of the Roman emperor Macrinus (Soyez 1972: Pl. I; Lipinski 1992b). Mettinger (1995: 95 ff) correctly underlined the absence of «canonical» anthropomorphic iconography of the main Phoenician gods Melqart and Eshmun, and suggested that they were represented as aniconic stones or stelae. This explains the wide popularity that *betyls* and empty thrones enjoyed in Phoenician iconography.

Finally, it is important to stress in this context that in the Punic world, *betyls* form by far the largest category of symbols represented on the stelae. According to Mettinger (1995: 82), «...on these Punic stelae, the motif that enjoyed special favor and is attested throughout the entire historical spectrum of Punic art is that of one or more pillars/betyls». They were called *nessibim* and they are attested under various forms: « *Le nesib peut avoir d'autres formes que celles de l'obélisque. Au tophet on en voit de sphériques ou d'ovoïdes, d'autres en forme de triangle ou de losange* » (Picard 1954: 75). This diversity applies to the representation of the *betyl* in Phoenicia. In the Punic world *betyls* were uninterruptedly represented on stelae from the 6th c. B.C. to the fall of Carthage (Bisi 1967: 219).

III.2.d Egyptian hieroglyphic signs: pseudo-ankh, ankh, and nfr symbols

The pseudo- or *ankh*-related signs: *ankh*, *s3*, or *betyls*? (Fig. 109)

The above-mentioned evidence concerning the representation of globular or hemispherical *betyls* on podiums, Asarte thrones, and/or portable shrines provides a clue for a better understanding of the symbols represented on stele 32, 42, and 44.

On stele 32, the depicted symbol consists of a globe placed on an object represented by a horizontal line resting on an inverted V-shaped stand. As in the case of the hemispherical symbols, the inverted V-shaped base is the continuation of the globe line. Inside the circular head is a pomegranate.

On stele 42, the same symbol is depicted with however, a slight variation: instead of a globe, a hemispherical object rests on a horizontal line. The «legs» are two oblique lines but they do not join as in the previous example.

Finally, the symbol on stele 44 represents clearly a globular object, which is placed above a horizontal line resting on two vertical, parallel lines.

All three symbols are obviously variants of the same representation. The symbols on stele 32, 42, and 44, do not appear here for the first time and wherever they were discussed, they have been interpreted as variants of the Egyptian *ankh* or *s3* sign.

Ronzevalle (1932: Pl. V and VII) was the first to collect a large number of similar symbols, which are attested on Phoenician glyptic, scarabs, weights, and coins as well as in the Punic world (for other parallels to these symbols see discussion of these stelae in Chapter I). His signs 29, 30, and 24 are exact replica of the symbols on stele 32, 42, and 44 respectively. Ronzevalle considered them all to be variants of the Egyptian hieroglyphic *ankh* sign, which he believed to be also at the origin of the Tanit sign.

In his short presentation of Phoenician symbols, Gubel (1992: 431) also considered similar signs to be variants of either *ankh* or *s3* sign: «Vient ensuite une série de s.(symboles) dont la signification iconologique nous échappe toujours. P.ex. , l'origine de l'ankh à tige bifurquée ... n'est pas claire: s'agit-il d'une version locale de l'ankh égyptien ou de l'hieroglyphe s3?». Elsewhere, however, the same author underlines the fact that this symbol and the *ankh* must be different since they appear sometimes together in the glyptic of the second millennium (1985: 179 and note 24). Teissier (1996: 104 and Fig. 49) who studied Egyptian symbols on Near Eastern glyptic of the Middle Bronze Age considers both shapes which occur together on the same seal, one with a vertical and the other with an inverted V-shaped stand, to represent the *ankh* sign. She believes that such «Typological differences do not appear to be significant» on Middle Bronze Age seals. Lipinski (1995: 207, 107 and 209, 118) refers to these symbols as «pseudo-ankh» and sees in them the predecessors of the Tanit sign. Hölbl (1989: 324 and note 35) objects to this designation because he believes that these signs are real hieroglyphs, which clearly reflect the Egyptian milieu from which they were borrowed. Finally, Nunn (2000: 96 and Pl.49, 89) interprets symbols with a forked base and circular head encompassing a round protuberance as *ankh* signs. Another symbol with a more oval head containing an unidentified motif inside it and resting on forked legs, very similar to the symbol on stele 32, is interpreted as the hieroglyphic sign *s3*, which means «protection» (Nunn 2000: 100, Pl. 54, 139).

Notwithstanding the similarity of these signs with the *ankh* as well as the fact that scholars are almost unanimous in interpreting them as variants of this sign (see Chapter 1 under stele 32, 42, 44)², there is, I believe, evidence to argue that these unusual symbols may have locally developed in order to adapt the *ankh* sign, to express or symbolize another religious reality, namely the representation of a *betyl* resting on a stool. One has to remember in this context that even Egyptians freely used hieroglyphic signs in art and modified them to represent an item: hence a vase found in the tomb of Tutankhamun is entirely made of such modified hieroglyphic signs. The *ankh* sign in particular, has on the above-mentioned vase, its crossbar shown as arms grasping the other signs (Wilkinson 1992: 10 and frontispiece figure). Phoenicians, like Egyptians, most probably used hieroglyphs very much in the same «secondary» way described by Wilkinson (1992: 11): «At this secondary level, objects, people or even gestures may be represented so as to suggest the form of the hieroglyphic signs and thus spell out a symbolic message.» (see also Wilkinson 1994: 151-161).

Since the *ankh* sign is a sandal strap or knot with joined laces, which are normally represented as one vertical line, all what the artist needed to do was to widely separate (écarter) them and to slightly modify the shape of the head, making it either perfectly circular or hemispherical, in order to suggest a sketched piece of furniture on which a *betyl* stood.

As mentioned above, *betyls* were placed on Astarte thrones, on stools, and were carried on portable shrines. The Phoenician terracotta plaque, which was published by Ronzevalle (1932: 60 and Pl. XI, 1) bears a similar representation. The similarity of this representation with the three symbols discussed is striking. Soyez (1972: 158 and Pl.II: 7) describes the terracotta as «...un naisque de terre cuite, abritant un siège pliant porteur d'un disque...» The question is whether the disc placed on the folding stool may be identified as a *betyl*.

2. I am very grateful to Egyptologist Joachim Quack for having discussed these symbols with me. He was reluctant at considering these awkward signs as real hieroglyphs but he did not exclude the fact that they may have been a later and local development of the original *ankh* sign. He rejected the identification of any of them with *s3*.

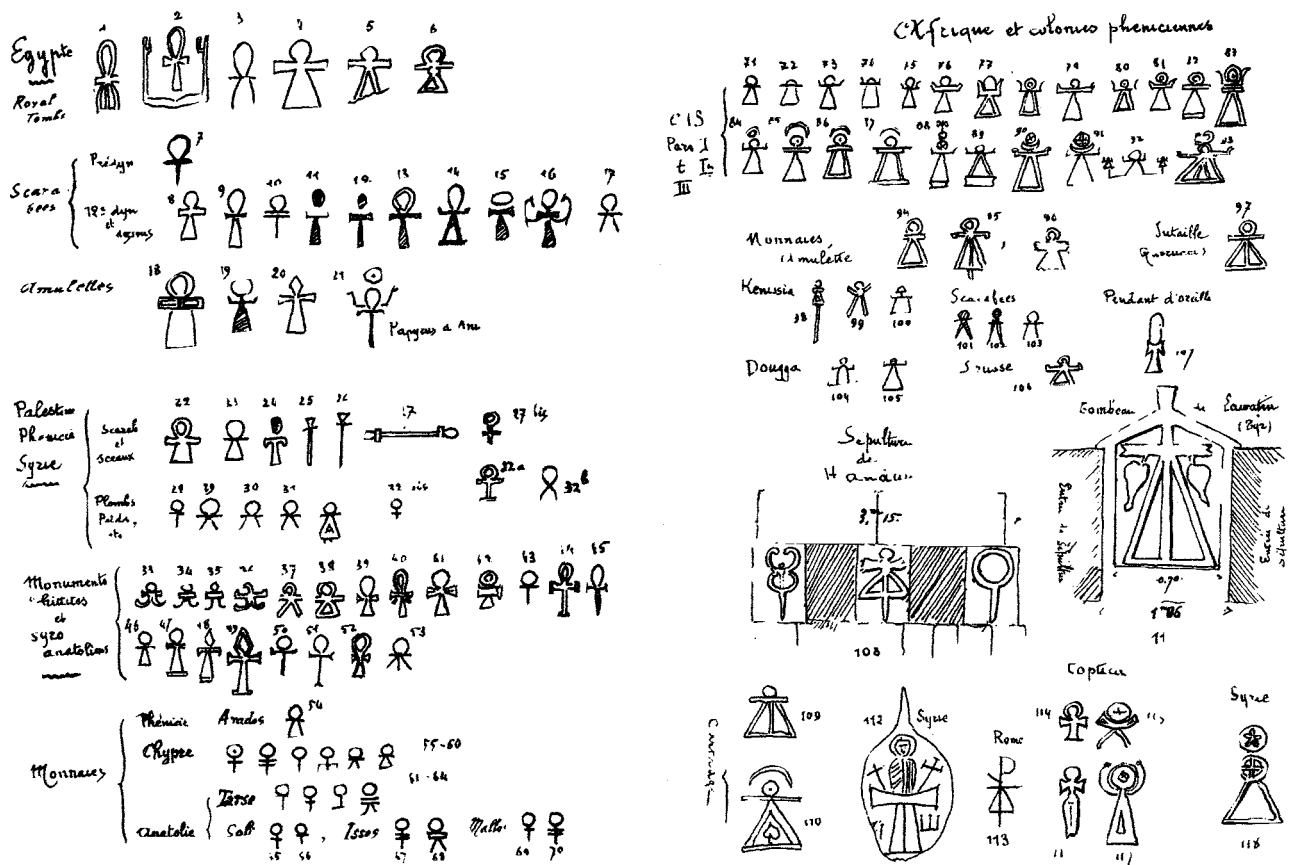


Fig. 107. «*ankh*», *pseudo-ankh*, and *Tanit* signs. (Ronzevalle 1932: V and XI, 5).



Fig. 108. Terracotta plaque representing a *betyl* on a folding stool (Ronzevalle 1932).

According to Milik (1967: 570): «*Les bétyles ... devaient garder la forme d'un globe, ou tout au moins de l'hémisphère ou de l'omphalos*». So *betyls* are usually, but not necessarily, represented as a conical, spherical or hemispherical figure. Spherical *betyls* on a throne are also depicted on Carthaginian stelae (Uberti 1992: Fig. 319; Bisi 1967: Pl. V, 2).

On the other hand, the forked base of the *ankh*-like symbols was adapted to render the crossed legs of a folding stool. Folding thrones or stools are attested in Phoenician representations of furniture (Markoe 1985: 316, G3; Gubel: 1987, 199 ff, Fig. 28, 29, 30, Pl. XL, 153, 154). Straight-legged stools were represented as two vertical parallel lines like those of the *ankh*-like symbol on stele 44.

In the light of the above, the *pseudo-ankh* sign may have acquired a double function: a prophylactic function bestowed by the original amulet-shaped hieroglyphic sign and a religious one by making it reminiscent of a sacred *betyl*, the stone symbolizing the deity.

Further evidence for this interpretation is the fact that inside the globular head of the symbol on stele 32, a pomegranate is depicted, a device usually used to represent the goddess Astarte. The fruit is represented as a circle topped by four short vertical lines. Such stylized representations of the pomegranate are common in Phoenician art: they are attested on the Nimrud patera (Wagner 1980: Pl. 4-1) and on Punic stelae like the one from Carthage at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Perrot-Chipiez 1885: Fig. 335) and the one from Medina illustrated by Picard (1957: Cb-1067) and Bisi (1967: Fig. 79). A pomegranate placed on a *betyl* is also attested on the Burj ash-Shemali stele 54, which provides additional evidence for the identification of the globular head of the pseudo-ankh sign as a *betyl*.

According to Bonatz (2000: 86 and note 83), the pomegranate is a genuine Near Eastern symbol the use of which became widespread in the Mediterranean both as divine attribute and as food for the dead. An Egyptian stele (Hölbl 1985: Pl. IXa) attests the use of the pomegranate as food for the dead. This fruit is usually associated with the fertility goddess Astarte/Tanit: «*Tanit et Baal prenaient enfin pour leur dévots bien d'autres apparences: celle du palmier qui, aujourd'hui encore en orient représente la générosité providentielle; celle de la grenade, dont les mille pépins évoquent l'inépuisable fécondité de la terre nourricière...*» (Picard 1954: 78). The fact that the pomegranate was one of Tanit/Astarte's symbols not only identifies the deity represented by the *betyl* of stele 32 and 54, it also brings additional support for the role played by Tanit/Astarte in funerary rituals.



Stele 32



Stele 42



Stele 44

Fig. 109. *Pseudo-ankh* signs.

The *ankh* sign (Fig. 111)

Next to the above series of *ankh-related* or *‘pseudo-ankh’* signs, which are generally considered to be a distortion, a *‘Syro-Phoenician aberration’* (Culican 1974: 197), of the original Egyptian hieroglyphic sign *ankh*, meaning life, ‘genuine’ hieroglyphic signs do appear on Phoenician monuments. This is clearly the case of the symbol on stele 6, which consists of a circle resting on a T-shaped form. This sign has been unanimously considered to represent a simplified form of the Egyptian hieroglyph *ankh*.

As already mentioned (see chapter I), this sign appears as early as the second millennium B.C. on Palestinian seals (Keel 1997 has a wealth of examples from that period; also Keel 1992: 32a, 32d, 34c, 79d, 92a). It becomes very widely attested in the Iron Age on Phoenician seals (Fig. 110) (Bordreuil 1986: Nos 1, 18) and tombstones (Delavault-Lemaire 1979: Pl. III, 5; Cross 2002: Fig. App. 1.4.), as well as on Palestinian glyptic (Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 247a, 249, 255, 279, 339, 340b). It appears very early on scarabs in association with another hieroglyph, the *nefer* sign which means ‘good, perfect’.



Fig. 110. *Ankh* sign on Phoenician seals (Bordreuil 1986: Fig. 254).

Another almost identical symbol appears on stele 17 and 26. The only difference is that the horizontal line is drawn a few centimeters below the circular head. This form of the sign is attested on scarabs where it has been identified as a variant of the *ankh*. Parallels to this variant are attested in second (Keel 213, 327; 295, 564; 299, 579) as well as first millennium glyptic (Keel 1997: 567, 103; 583, 147; 593, 176; 749, 4; see also Perrot-Chipiez 1885: Fig. 437).

As already mentioned, the hieroglyphic sign, *ankh*, means ‘life’ (te Velde 1985: 66). In funerary contexts however, the sign came to symbolize eternal life (Derchain 1975: 268-269) and it is probably this meaning that the sign has on the funerary stelae.

There is a variant of the *ankh* sign with a triangular instead of a circular head, which sometimes appear in Phoenician and Hebrew glyptic, in connection with astral symbols. According to Uehlinger (1990: 324), this variant

is also to be identified as an *ankh* or life sign and should not be interpreted as an astral symbol. He also suggested that the *ankh* sign used in connection with astral symbols may have occasionally been associated with the cult of Astarte, Queen of Heavens: » *Auch von daher ist eine-zumindest okkasionelle- Verbindung des 'nh-ähnlichen Elements mit der Göttin Istar/Astarte, der 'Himmelskönigin', zu erwägen...zumal es auf einem phönizischen Namensiegel direct vor der Göttin zu sehen ist* (1990: 326).

The *nfr* sign (Fig. 111)

A second hieroglyphic sign is attested on stele 52. It consists of a circle attached to a vertical line that ends with a short horizontal stroke. This sign is identified as the Egyptian hieroglyph *nfr*, «heart plus windpipe» (Gardiner 1957; Wilkinson 1992: 79), meaning «good, perfect». It is usually represented in its original form with the circular head at the bottom but it may also be represented upside down (for example Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 39b; 1997: 109, 12; Taylor 2004: Fig. 1, 1809) or lying horizontally (Keel 1997: 137, 95-96; 731, 110; Taylor 2004: Fig.1, 1780). It may have one or two horizontal lines.

Both *ankh* and *nefer* signs appear very often on seals, scarabs and stelae. They are among the most widely borrowed Egyptian hieroglyphs in Syro-Palestinian iconography. The reason why these as well as other specific Egyptian hieroglyphs are so often represented independently on monuments is because they were used as amulets: »*Symbolic qualities of the hieroglyphic writing-signs become apparent especially in those hieroglyphs that were used as amulets*» (te Velde 1985-86: 65; see also Keel 1995: 167). Some, like the *ankh* sign, were used as amulets as early as the late third millennium B.C. while others, like the *nefer* sign, were first used on stelae and scarabs before being used as amulets (Keel 1995: 167). These hieroglyphs, which are known as *nefer* signs, were believed to bring luck: » *Wie nfr, das «schön, gut, glücklich, vollkommen» u.ä bedeutet, haben auch die anderen Zeichen weniger die Funktion, unheilvolle Kräfte abzuwehren und so apotropäisch zu wirken, als vielmehr die positiven Mächte für die TrägerInnen zu vergewärtigen*» (Keel 1995: 168).

To conclude: Egyptian hieroglyphs enjoyed a very wide popularity in Phoenician art and they were used on funerary stelae most probably in their original Egyptian function as «*porte-bonheur*» as well as symbols for eternal life, youth, and regeneration. Wilkinson (1992: 10), correctly pointed out that in Egypt: «Individual hieroglyphic signs were ...often the models for parts or even whole works of art and complex compositions, and the interaction between writing and pictorial representation was an ever present reality».

III.2.e The isosceles triangle (Fig. 112) and the origin of the «Tanit sign»

On stele 45, two isosceles triangles are depicted. Garbini (1980: 183) is the only scholar who attempted an interpretation of this symbol which appears in Sardinia and in Malta. According to him, in a religious and funerary context, this sign represents the goddess Astarte. The Italian scholar also suggested an oriental origin of the symbol, a suggestion now confirmed by the evidence of stele 45.

Triangles as symbols of the goddess Astarte are attested in the Wasta grotto (Beaulieu and Mouterde 1947-48: Pl. V and Fig. 1). The triangles in the Wasta grotto differ however in that they are represented with apex at bottom (for the same motif, see also Pritchard 1988: Fig. 9: 2, dated to the LBA) and with a vertical incision. They most probably represent pubic triangles and/or female sexual organs. Their identification as Astarte symbols is suggested by one of the inscriptions left by worshippers on the walls, which confirms that the grotto was dedicated to the cult of Aphrodite-Astarte (Beaulieu and Mouterde 1947-48: 6 ff). Though plausible, Garbini's interpretation of the isosceles triangle as a symbol of Astarte still awaits decisive evidence.

We have to admit that there is no satisfactory interpretation of the isosceles triangle symbol, a correct identification and understanding of which may have a strong bearing on the origin and interpretation of the Tanit sign³.

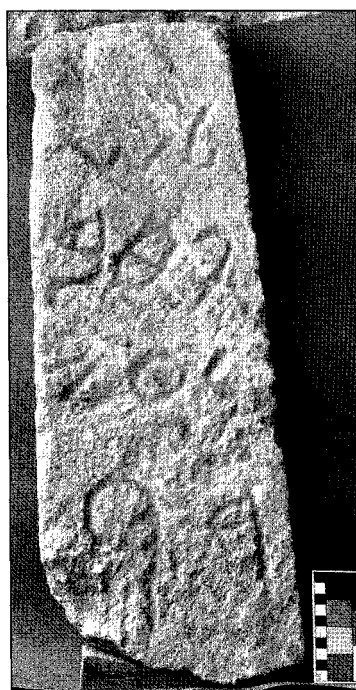
3. The problem of the origin and meaning of the Tanit sign was often discussed. For a summary of the main theories and the related bibliography, see Sally Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in their Mediterranean Context*. JSOT/ASOR Monographic Series, No 3. Sheffield Academic Press 1991 and Lipinski 1995: 209ff.



Stele 6



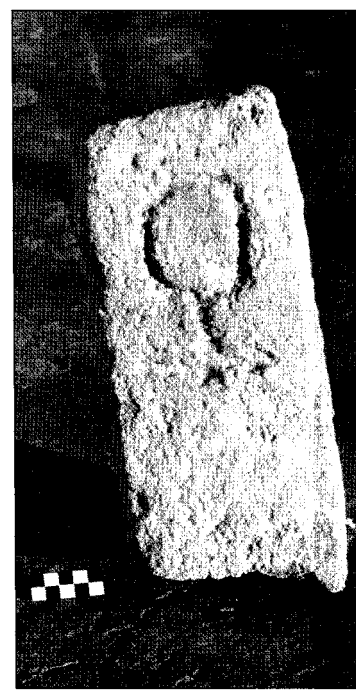
Stele 17



Stele 20



Stele 26



Stele 52

Fig. 111. *Ankh* and *nfr* signs.

Origin and meaning of the Tanit sign

Based on his identification of the isosceles triangle as a symbol of Astarte, Garbini presented a highly attractive hypothesis concerning the origin and the meaning of the so-called Tanit sign, a hypothesis, which seems to find additional support in the evidence provided by stele 45. He considered that the Tanit sign is a later combination of both the *ankh* sign and the isosceles triangle. The first one symbolizes life while the other symbolizes fertility (Garbini 1980: 179).

That the Tanit sign is a combination of *ankh* and triangle seems to find additional support in the symbol depicted on a funerary monument found in Hanaway, east of Tyre (Virolleaud 1924: Fig. 3, Bisi 1967: 30 and Fig. 6), as well as on a Carthaginian stele (Brown 1986: Fig. 45, ff). On both monuments, the sign is clearly a combination of the *ankh* and triangle symbols. Bisi (1967: 30-31) underlined however the fact that this form of the Tanit sign, with the vertical shaft of the *ankh* crossing the triangle, is very rare in both Phoenicia and the West and she described it as an *unicum*.

The fact that both triangle and *ankh* sign appear separately long before the first attested Tanit sign in both East and West, speaks also in favor of the development proposed by Garbini. Indeed, Tanit signs in their later canonical or standard form do not appear in Carthage (Bisi 1967: 29), in Phoenicia, and in Palestine (Linder 1973: 182ff; Dothan 1974: 44ff.; Benigni 1975: 17ff; Wolff 1991; Lipinski 1995: 209ff) before the 4th c. B.C. while the symbols on the Phoenician stelae cannot be later than the 6th c. B.C.

However attractive this interpretation may be, one has to admit that it does not account for all the later variants or developments of the Tanit sign. If one contemplates the various representations of the Tanit sign documented by Bisi (1967: Fig. 7) and Picard (1957: Tableau II), the constant elements are clearly the circular head, the crossbar with or without raised ends, an inverted V-shaped support with or without a base. These elements are indeed identical to those forming the so-called *pseudo-ankh* signs depicted above as already observed by Ronzevalle (1932) and Lipinski (1995: 209 ff) who both believe that the *ankh* sign is the symbol out of which the Tanit sign developed.

Since *pseudo-ankh* and Tanit sign share the same basic features, the same argument that was developed for the interpretation of the *pseudo-ankh* sign may thus be developed here for the interpretation of the Tanit sign, namely that it adapted the *ankh* sign to represent a *betyl* resting on a throne or on a portable shrine.

The Tanit sign has been variously explained. Brown (1986: 162) summed up all the interpretations that have been proposed: «*The motif has been interpreted variously as a Tyrian anchor, a Cypriot palmette, an Egyptian ankh, a worshipper praying (or a symbol of the prayer or vow itself), a divinity with hands raised in benediction, a female figure with her hands at her breasts, a Minoan female idol, and a betyl combined with an astral disc*».

The interpretation of the Tanit sign proposed here is a variant of the above-proposed evolution of the *ankh* sign. This evolution, as previously argued, adapted the *ankh* sign to represent a sacred *betyl* on a stool. Our suggestion provides plausible explanations to all the later variants of the sign:

1. The raised or curved ends of the crossbar of the Tanit sign could represent the arms of the throne, altar, or stool on which the *betyl* stood. On the other hand, the fact that hieroglyphic signs, mainly the *ankh* sign, were often «personified», may also account for this later development and explain the later «anthropomorphic» aspect of the Tanit sign. Its curving crossbar was indeed compared to hands and its later form developed a sort of human shape. As already mentioned, *ankh* signs in Egypt are depicted with a crossbar in the shape of hands and according to Wilkinson (1992: 11) personified hieroglyphs are a device used «to identify hypostases-the personifications of ideas or non-human things- or to enrich the symbolic value of an object in some way».
2. The base with incurved sides on which the Tanit sign sometimes stands (Bisi 1967: Fig. 7: a, c, d, e, g, h, j, o, s) has its origin in the representation of Egyptian podiums on which hemispherical or rectangular *betyls* and/or shrines stand (Brown 1986: Fig. 45, b, dd; Bisi 1967: Pl. XVII, 2; XXI, 2; see also stele 54). This is clear evidence that the Tanit sign represents a device that originally stood on a podium. The later base of the inverted V-shaped sign may have resulted from a simplification of this podium or base.
3. The fact that the circular head of the Tanit sign is sometimes replaced by a pomegranate like on the Me-deina stele (Bisi 1967: Fig. 79) or by a caduceus (Brown 1986: 526), or by a rosette (Picard 1957: Cb-424 and Cb-685), or by a divided cross (Picard 1957: Cb-563) or by a crescent moon topped by a sun-disc (Bi-

si 1967: Fig. 82), strengthens the assumption that this component of the sign represents or symbolizes the deity, i-e a *betyl*, and could be replaced by another of his/her symbols. Often again, the head has a hemispherical shape clearly suggesting an omphalos-shaped *betyl*.

4. Finally, the Tanit sign in the West is often represented inside a shrine (see for example Picard 1957: Pl. XLVI, Cb-334, 335) in the very same way as the *betyl* on a stool or throne is represented inside an *aedicula* on the above-mentioned stelae and coins of Lebanon.

To conclude: The isosceles triangle is a symbol that was used in funerary contexts but its meaning still escapes us. Whether it was at the origin of the later Tanit sign remains an open question. The evidence seems rather to suggest that the later Tanit sign is a composite symbol representing originally a circular or hemispherical *betyl* and the piece of furniture or architecture on which it stood. Its oriental origin, which was often doubted, cannot be anymore denied. Finally, it is not surprising that the most widespread religious symbols of the Phoenician world, *ankh* and *betyl*, combined to form a sort of logo or amulet, used for the protection of both the living and the dead (Picard 1957: 25).



Stele 45

Fig. 112. Isosceles Triangles.



Stele 11

Fig.113. Lotus bud.

III.2.f The Cross Symbol (Fig. 114)

Five stelae, 26, 27, 28, 38, and 47, are decorated with an incised cross. On stele 26, the cross is associated with two *ankh* signs and two discs placed in the lower and upper quadrants respectively. On stele 27, it is associated with the crescent-disc and on stele 28, with the U-shaped symbol; on stele 38 it appears alone below the inscription, and finally on stele 47, it was incised on the skull of a human head. On stele 27 and 28, the cross symbol has a longer

vertical line and is interrupted in its middle by the motif it is associated with. On the other three stelae, the cross has almost equally long arms.

The cross, as an independent motif, is attested on Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian seals and on Neo-Assyrian jewelry where, according to Black and Green (1992: 54), «*it is a sun-symbol, substituting for the solar disc, or in positions later occupied by the winged disc... There are strong indications for the cross as a further symbol (together with the solar and winged disc) of the sun god Šamaš (Utu)*».

Neo-Babylonian iconography provides evidence for a solar disc divided into four quadrants by a cross as attested on a representation of the Weather-god Adad from Babylon (Seidl 2000: 100, Fig 7). On the god's dress are represented three discs: the upper one is divided into four quadrants by a cross. A round motif, possibly a planet or a star, is placed in each quadrant. On the god's chest is another smaller disc inside which is a cross. On a neo-Babylonian *kudurru* (Seidl 2000: Fig. 8) the dress of a female goddess is decorated with planet representations and crosses. The same motifs are depicted on a wall in Persepolis (Seidl 2000: Fig. 9).

From Syria/Palestine, the closest parallel to the symbol on stele 26 is a second millennium seal from Tell el 'Aḡul (Keel 1997: 185, 244) representing a rotated cross with four circles in the quadrants. The circles have a dot in the middle to represent the sun (Wilkinson 1992: 10, 129). Solar discs are also depicted in the upper quadrants on stele 26.

Other close parallels to the symbol under discussion are crosses placed within a solar disc. This motif is attested in second millennium B.C. Syria-Palestine. One example is the Canaanite Late Bronze Age stele (Lipinski 1995: 71), now in the Hecht Museum collection, which represents a female goddess wearing a Hathor crown. The latter consists of a wide-open pair of horns inside which is a sun-disc. A cross divides the disc into four quadrants and inside each is a protruding round motif, which cannot be clearly identified. The same symbol is also found on a stele from Ugarit (Bisi 1967: Pl. III, 1) and on a Late Bronze Age scarab from Ashkelon (Keel 1997: 50).

It is very interesting to note that the cross symbol appears on three Akhziv stelae (Cross 2002: Nos 2, 5, 6) and in one case, stele No 5, within a rectangle. Cross (2002: 171) believes that this symbol is related to the *crux ansata*, which is highly improbable since both signs appear simultaneously on stele 26. Another Iron Age parallel, cross inside a disc, is represented on two bronze cultic objects published by Seyrig (1966: 16 ff and Pls. VIII and IX).

The same symbol also occurs in the Punic world where it is always attested inside a solar disc. In one example depicting the sun above the crescent moon (Bisi 1967: Fig. 86), the solar symbol is divided by a cross and in each of the quadrants is a dot while in other examples (Bisi 1967: Pl. XVI, 1), quadrants are empty.

In the light of the above evidence, it is very likely that the cross motif depicted on the Phoenician stelae should be interpreted as a simplification of the divided sun-disc motif as suggested by Black and Green. On the very poor representations of the funerary stelae from Lebanon, it is possible that the divided solar disc may have been reduced to a simple incised cross.

If the identification of the cross symbol as the sun seems to be a reasonable suggestion, its interpretation remains problematic. As already pointed out, little is known in Phoenician religion about the attributes and role of heavenly bodies, mainly the Sun- and Moon-god.

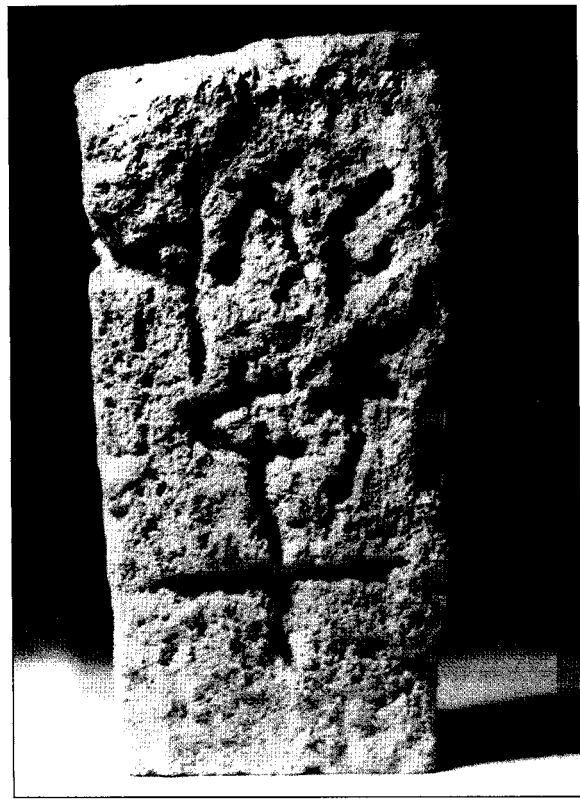
Concerning the possible role that a sun god or goddess may have played in the Phoenician funerary cult, there is only indirect evidence from Ugarit. The Ugaritic sun-goddess Shapash played a role in the funerary cult of the kingdom as attested in the Baal cycle texts (Wyatt 1998: 129, note 65, 139). It is indeed with her help that the dead body of Baal is found and secured a proper burial. This role in the funerary cult may have been played in Phoenicia by the sun god(dess) (Bonnet-Lipinski 1992b: 409; Lipinski 1995: 268 and note 350). A possible survival of the sun goddess in a woman-headed beetle, which appears on a Hebrew seal is suggested by Uehlinger (Sass-Uehlinger 1993: 277). The representation of the Sun-god Ra as a beetle rising from the netherworld as the morning sun is attested in Egypt (Lurker 1980: 74) and symbolizes the regeneration power of the astral body. The very widespread use of the winged sun-disc on funerary stelae in later periods may strengthen such an assumption.

In Egypt, the sun god symbolized the emergence of new life because he seemed to be born daily in the East after having been swallowed by the sky goddess in the West. The daily itinerary of the sun was believed to go through four stages: sunrise, crossing of the sky, sunset and crossing of the Underworld (Assman 1984: 1088). In the Underworld «he gives life to the inhabitants of the nether world, gives each person his share of land to cultivate, execute the enemies...and is rejuvenated» (Watson 1991: 159). In short, the cross symbol may be interpreted as representing the Sun-god who symbolized regeneration and rebirth after death.

It is even more difficult to propose an interpretation of the symbol combination on stele 26, 27, 28. It may be either a mere juxtaposition or «free» composition of prophylactic and religious signs, or a perception of a cosmic reality in which the sun, as in Ugarit and Egypt, plays an important role in both the world of the living and the



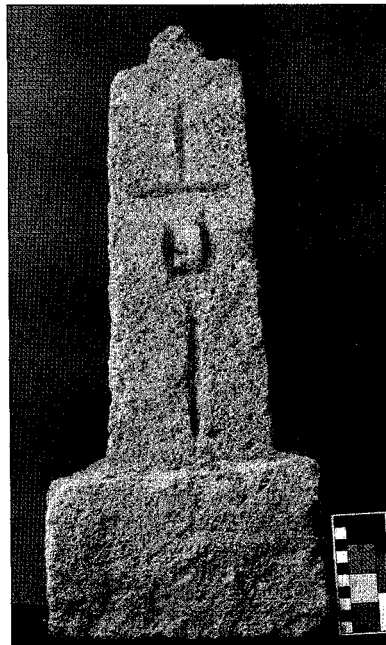
Stele 47



Stele 38



Stele 26



Stele 28



Stele 27

Fig. 114. Cross symbol.

world of the dead. On stele 26 for example, one is tempted to explain the four quadrants defined by the cross as the four world directions and/or the «upper» and «lower» worlds in which the heavenly body moves freely. The upper two quadrants with the sun disc may represent the world of the living, and the lower two quadrants with the *ankh* sign, symbol of eternal life, the world of the dead. This and any other interpretation remain, of course, highly hypothetical in the present state of the evidence.

III.2.g The Anthropomorphic Representations (Fig. 116)

Five stelae, 9, 44, 46, 47 and 50 represent human figures. Stele 47 and 50 are broken and only the heads are preserved while the other three are complete. These human representations differ greatly from each other as well as from those depicted on Punic stelae. While stele 46 was clearly cut in the shape of a human body others, like stele 9 and 44, consist in roughly engraved faces on a rectangular stone. Stele 47 and 50 are broken but since the surviving head is three-dimensional it is possible to assume that they have been cut as anthropomorphic stelae.

The anthropomorphic representations on the funerary stelae are the first of their kind to appear on Iron Age tombstones from Lebanon. Only one stele carved with a Negroid human face is known from Akhziv (Cross 2002: No 6; Cross seems however to doubt the authenticity of the engraved motif). The human rock reliefs of Wadi Cana (Kaoukabani 1971: 23-27) and Deir Qanun Ras al Ayn (Renan 1864: 690) east of Tyre, probably belong to the same tradition and represent close, though later parallels to these human figures. Renan (1864: 653) and Le Lasseur (1922: 122) found in the necropolis of Wasta and Mahalib respectively, human heads similar to the above-described ones.

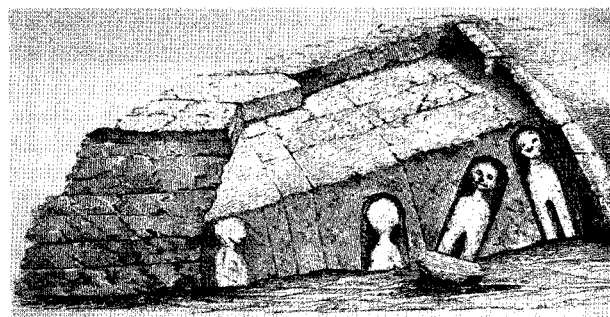
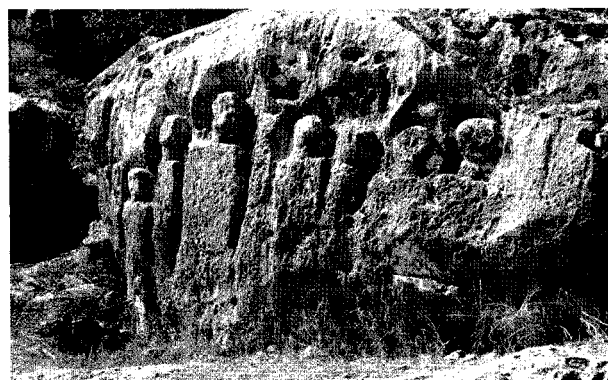


Fig. 115. Human figures from Wadi Cana (Photo courtesy G. Mass-Lindemann) and Deir Canun (Renan 1864).

The anthropomorphic representations of Cana, Wasta, Mahalib, and Deir Canun, share with those on the funerary stelae characteristic features such as a primitive and crude aspect, a naïve character of the face features and a shapeless body represented as a mere stone block. This type of anthropomorphic representations seems to have been very common in the funerary contexts of southern Phoenicia.

In the Punic world anthropomorphic representation are very well attested but they often radically differ from the Phoenician ones. Punic stelae often represent cultic scenes involving priests and gods (Picard 1957: 28 ff). Human figures inside a shrine were clearly identified as gods while priests were recognized at their dress and at the fact that they were depicted performing a sacrifice. Human representations that could not be clearly identified as either gods or priests were identified as worshippers. This is for example the case of human representations on a specific category of 5th-4th c. B.C. Carthaginian funerary stelae, which always depict a person with a raised hand, and of which one (Ferron 1975: Pl. CXXXVII) is a close parallel to stele 9. Ferron (1975: 286 ff) rejected this interpretation and argued that these anthropomorphic figures are divine beings, «*morts-dieux*» or «*deified deceased*», and he defended their Phoenician origin: «*En Phénicie comme dans la «Nouvelle Tyr», l'ensemble de ces figures doivent être interprétées comme des morts-dieux, et non pas comme des adorants, malgré l'accord unanime des orientalistes à ce sujet*» (287). According to Ferron (1975: 301-302), the prototype for these human representations are the figures depicted on the lid of the Ahirom sarcophagus which he interpreted as representing the deified deceased.

The interpretation of the human figures on the funerary stelae is more difficult for lack of significant clues and also because they do not form a homogeneous group. Since they are clearly different, should each type of human representation be differently interpreted? In other words, could each type have had a different meaning and a different role? It is possible but without additional evidence, it is of course difficult to answer this question.

For the interpretation of these anthropomorphic figures, three suggestions can be proposed:

1. The human figure represents the deceased
2. The human figure represents a divine being
3. The human figure is the personification of a force enjoying apotropaic powers.

Gawlikowski (1970: 10) favors the first interpretation for all types of stelae whether human-shaped or not. As already mentioned in Chapter I, he thinks that any funerary monument, whatever its shape, represents the dead. He argues that the stele is the receptacle of the dead's soul: «*L'âme du défunt était censée d'habiter la pierre dressée, sa représentation*» (Gawlikowski 1970: 18).

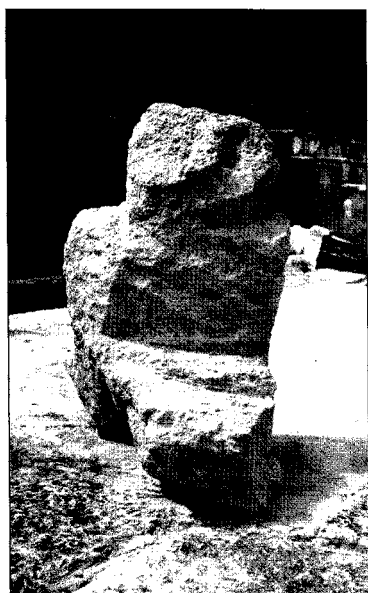
In their study of the anthropomorphic stele found in Cnossos, Kourou and Grammatikaki (1998: 242 and note 24) adopted Gawlikowski's (1972) and Kaoukabani's (1971: 34-35) interpretation of funerary monuments in general and of those of the Wadi Cana in particular. Both scholars are of the opinion that the rock reliefs of Cana are so-called *nefesh* monuments dedicated to commemorating the deceased. Based on this assumption, Kourou and Grammatikaki argued that since the stele becomes the residence of the dead person's soul, it is to be expected that it should be given a human shape. So all human-shaped stelae should be interpreted as representing the dead person.

Moscatti (1995: 523-541) did not discuss the meaning or the symbolism of the stylized anthropomorphic representations on the Sardinian stelae, including the newly discovered material from the area of Sassari, which date to the Roman period but which are similar in many ways to the Lebanese examples. He denied any Punic influence on the Sassari stelae and he clearly opposed their funerary character to the votive character of the Punic ones. The human figures on the latter represent, according to him, gods or priests, while he expresses no opinion concerning the human figures from Sardinia.

In Lebanon, no human figure is represented standing inside a shrine and none of them presents any specific feature or attribute that may suggest its divine nature. There is maybe one exception: stele 47 has a cross, engraved on its skull. This symbol may be interpreted as an attribute of the Sun god (see above) but this evidence is too scanty to allow the interpretation of the figure on stele 47 as a divine representation or as the deified deceased.

The third possibility is to consider these human figures as apotropaic representations. In favor of this interpretation, speaks the fact that on all stelae, only the face is depicted. Furthermore, the face has unrealistic, crude and schematized features, which add to its unnatural aspect and vague expression. The insistence on representing only the face and in representing it in such an elusive way, may suggest a function similar to that of funerary masks. These were sometimes made of stone (Ciasca 1988: 354), and they were very widespread in both Phoenicia and the colonies where they were mainly found in tombs (Ciasca 1988: 354). The apotropaic function of these masks is generally accepted. They were used as a substitute for the decomposing face of the deceased in order to allow him/her access to the underworld but at times, they also aimed at covering it in order to prevent the propagation of demoniac powers, which the person could have acquired after death (Krien-Kummrow 1961: 902). Garbini was the first to ascribe an apotropaic function to the stone head found in a tomb in Sardinia (see Chapter I).

In the light of the above evidence, the human figures represented on the funerary stelae could be interpreted as the personification of a supernatural force whose function was to protect the tomb, either by chasing threatening bad spirits away or by preventing those who would eventually come out of the tomb to harm the living. Made both from an imperishable material, the mask was placed inside the tomb to protect the dead himself in the afterlife while the anthropomorphic stele, which is usually placed either at the entrance of or outside the tomb, aimed at protecting the sepulture of the deceased from demoniac forces and eventually, from tomb robbers. It is possible that some sectors of the cemetery and not individual tombs were placed under such protection since the use of anthropomorphic stelae was not generalized and none of them was inscribed with a personal name.



Stele 46



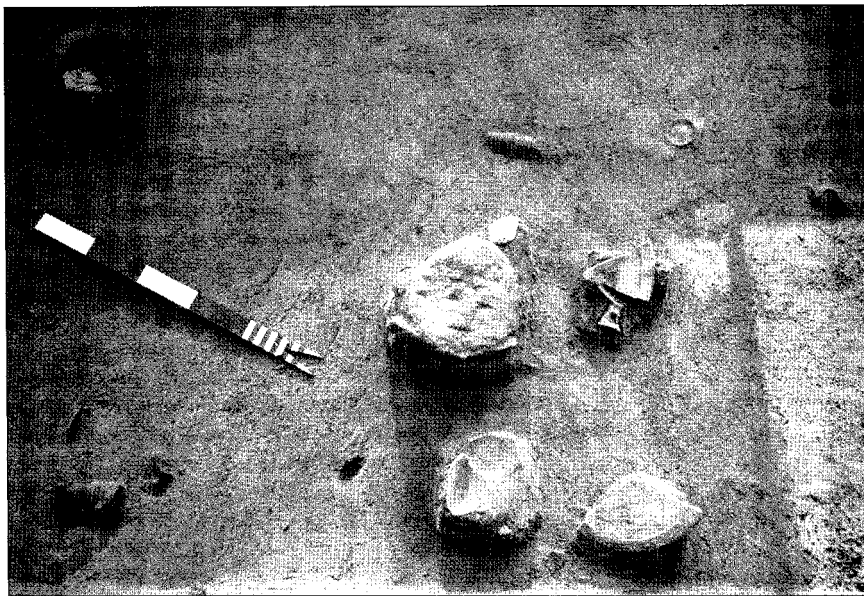
Stele 47



Stele 9



Stele 44



Stele 50

Fig. 116. Human figures.

III.2.b The shrine (Fig. 117)

Four of the Common stelae, 7, 10, 43, 48, and all the Persian period ones, 53-59, represent shrines. The shrine on stele 7 and 43 is a simple *naos* consisting in a rectangular or square niche. It is clearly in the tradition of second millennium *naoi* like those found in the Obelisk temple in Byblos, which Wagner (1980: 122) calls *«Kastenförmiger Naiskostyp»*. A figurine representing the god or goddess was most probably placed inside the shrine (see Chapter I). The Iron Age stone shrine model from Lebanon, which was first published by Seyrig (1966: VIII), has a standing

male figure flanked by two bulls, which clearly confirms this tradition. This type of shrine, which goes back to the 9th c. B.C. (see stele 7) seems to be the oldest Iron Age type attested.

Slightly later is the shrine depicted on stele 10: It displays clear Egyptian influence and corresponds to Wagner's type 3.3.3.1 (1980: 123) which depicts only the façade of the shrine: » *Die architektonische Gliederung ist auf die Fassade beschränkt. Pfosten und Sturz bilden die Rahmung der Öffnung. Darüber folgt eine Hohlkehle, die sich nur nach vorne vorwölbt.* The symbol placed inside the shrine is quite unusual and may be identified as a male sexual organ. If Lipinski (1995: 215 ff) is correct in his assumption that Pa'am could also mean Phallus, the symbol could very well represent this deity.

Shrines on stele 53 to 59 imitate Egyptian *naiskoi* and Wagner (1980) thoroughly discussed all motifs, which were borrowed from Egypt. This type of shrine corresponds to Wagner's type 3.3.4 characterized by typically Egyptian hollow gorge or cornice, *uraeus* frieze and winged sun disc. Alternating lotus buds and flowers, which in Egypt are found only on kiosks and not on *naiskoi*, decorate the lintel (for parallels from Egypt and Phoenicia see Wagner 1980: 129ff, 208 note75). Lotus buds and flowers are regeneration symbols (Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 61, 194, 282), which also occur on stele 11 (Fig. 113). The lotus flower was believed to be the cradle of the Sun god and «is therefore a very important organism which was viewed as being an important initiator of the creation of the cosmos, and was abundantly used as religious symbol communicating its creative and regenerative powers» (Watson 1991: 158).

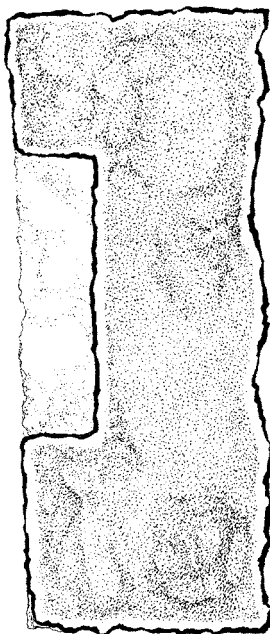
Local Phoenician motifs were also used to decorate this Egyptian type of shrine: palmettes were used for the doorjambs (see Wagner 1980: 130, 209 notes 76-80): they are widely known to symbolize generosity (Picard 1954: 78; Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 80: » *...der stilisierte Baum die gebärfähige und nährenden Segensmacht der fruchtbaren Erde darstellt.*...) and were often used as symbols of the goddess Astarte (Keel and Uehlinger 1992: 34). Finally, *betyls* and Astarte thrones, which represent the deity, were placed inside the shrine.

Notwithstanding typological differences, all shrines served a cultic and religious function the details of which are still in the dark (for recent archaeological evidence related to Phoenician funerary cult from the cemetery of Tyre el-Bass, see Aubet 2004: 61 ff). One obvious purpose was to place the tomb and the dead under the protection of the deity who was present in the shrine and who was the recipient of the cultic and funerary offerings. In his discussion of the iconography of Punic stelae representing shrines, which were found in *tophets*, Ribichini (2002: 438-439) underlines the cultic role of this type of stelae and believes that they represent the shrine that existed inside the *tophet's* precinct and which was dedicated to the deity in charge of the sacred funerary area. These stelae played therefore an important role in the funerary cult: » *In definitiva, le stele in forma di sacello evocano gli edifici reali innalzati nel tofet e per questo sono al centro dell'attenzione per il fedele che si recava in quell luogo; il tempietto, a sua volta, replica in funzione comunitaria ciò che la stele rappresenta per la devozione privata e magnifica. la fede nel poteri del dio...*». This interpretation finds additional support in the fact that stone and clay shrine models were even placed inside the tomb. Several examples are attested from Sidon and Tyre (see Chapter I and Metzger 2004). Some of them (stele 53-59) are clear copies of the shrine depicted on the stele, which, in turn, must have imitated the actual temple. This evidence underlines the central role shrines played in the Phoenician funerary cult.

Whether the deity placed inside the shrine in Phoenician cemeteries was always the same remains an open question. The evidence from the Burj ash-Shemali stele (54), which has two *betyls* as well as that of Punic stelae, which have groups of two or three *betyls*, indicates however that more than one god or goddess may have been involved in the funerary cult. In the absence of written records and of clear attributes, the issue of their identity remains unsolved. In the shrine model published by Seyrig (1966: VIII), the god represented is most probably the weather-god Baal since bulls flank the divine figure while in the model found by Renan (Gubel 2002: No 75), the identity of the seated male god could not be determined. On a terracotta plaque found in Helaliyye, near Sidon, now in the Louvre Museum (AO 2719), a nude female goddess standing on two crouching lions clearly identifiable with Astarte, is depicted inside a *naiskos* (Gubel 1986: 274, Fig.10). Some stelae (Stele 55-56) have Astarte thrones placed inside the shrine but these unfortunately do not betray the identity of the deity they are supposed to represent. Finally, as already mentioned, stele 10 may represent the god Pa'am. The available evidence hence indicates that different gods, among whom Baal, Astarte and Pa'am, may have played a role in the funerary cult.



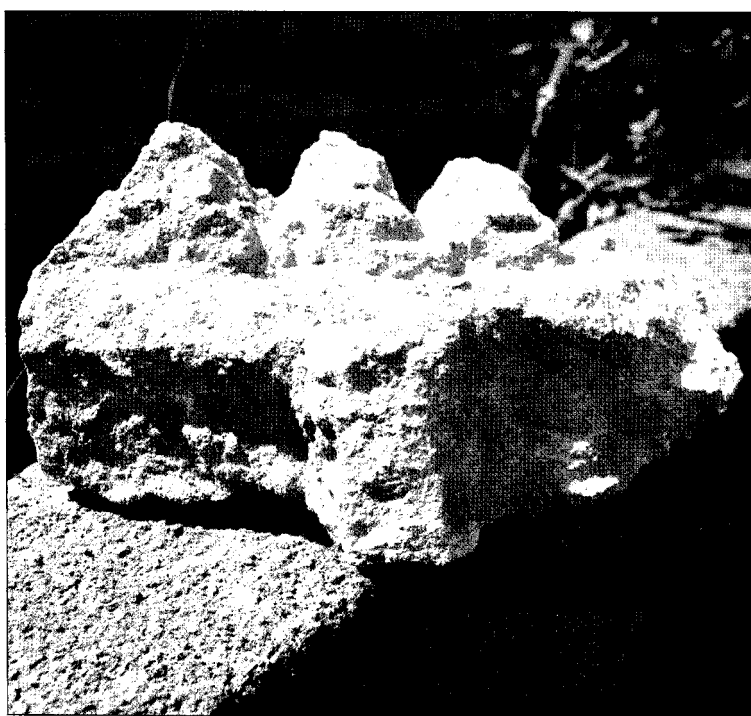
Stele 7



Stele 43



Stele 10



Stele 48

Fig. 117. Shrines.